

[By Susie Steimle](#)

From farm to table, from Vermont to Washington D.C., local farmers had coffee with their representatives Friday morning, hoping the conversation will help their bottom lines.

"We've got a real responsibility to do something that makes it possible for our local farmers to sustain themselves," said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vermont.

The numbers are staggering. In 1950, Vermont had 50,000 dairy farms. Today there are fewer than 1,000.

"I think the goal here is to keep the farmers we have here in business and keep them going," Welch said.

But the question is how? Vermont's congressional delegation is pushing for the dairy security act to be attached to the farm bill.

"We've had these wild swings where the price goes up but then it plunges, the price goes up and it plunges deeper," Welch said.

The act is an effort to decrease the dramatic swings by getting the milk industry to work together nationwide.

"We're hoping that we've found a vehicle to unite us as an industry and that's something that's been difficult to do over the last few years," said David Conant who owns Riverside Farm.

It gives a financial incentive to farmers who stop producing when there is a collapse like the one in 2009. If farmers overproduce when demand is down it affects everyone's prices negatively. Milk prices in 2009 hit a record low of \$13 per hundred pounds of milk. After climbing slightly in 2011 the forecast threatens to drop below \$18 this year. For Conant's farm it costs roughly \$19 to produce that much milk, so right now the farm isn't breaking even.

"We don't want to be always recognized as the struggling dairy farmer if you will," Conant said.

Young farmers say the stigma of the "struggling industry" could be doing more harm than the inconsistent market prices.

"I think if I was a kid I wouldn't be that excited about entering into a struggling industry," Conant said.

Conant's son Ransom is the sixth generation to grow up on this picturesque property. He's hoping to pass it on to his kids some day and that the dairy industry's bottom line doesn't force him to be the end of his family's line of farmers.

Congress has until October to pass the Farm Bill. Welch says there's growing support in his committee from other dairy producing states.